



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In accordance with Wisconsin Administrative Code, NR 44-Master Planning for Department Properties, the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest (NH-AL) embarked on a plan to involve the public in the process of developing a revised master plan. From its beginning, steps were taken to ensure there were opportunities for public involvement throughout the planning process.

The Department developed a public involvement plan and distributed it for public review and comment. This plan described the reasons for public involvement, identified stages of the planning process, and listed opportunities for public participation.

METHODS OF PUBLIC CONTACT

The planning process emphasized the use of direct mail and face-to-face meetings of discussion and working groups. People were informed via statewide news releases, direct mailings of meeting announcements and progress reports, public meetings, a forest tour, e-mail, a web site, letter responses, and personal or telephone contacts.

The Department involved local governments and tribal contacts. Consultation with the tribes is conducted on a government-to-government basis as required under Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 44.04 (7)(c).

The Wisconsin DNR Internet web site http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/master_planning/NH-AL/index.htm displays master planning pages for the NH-AL. This site incorporates nearly all documentation produced on the plan, making it readily available to anyone with Internet access. Draft planning documents were posted on the web site as they were made available to the public.

The following information can be located or ordered from the web site:

- A description and map of the forest
- A description of master planning
- Supporting documents – a series of master planning fact sheets; ten Northern State Forest Assessments, including a complete Biotic Inventory of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest; Chapter NR 44 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code; and a regional analysis of the forest.
- Progress reports and other updates
- Meeting announcements, media archives and contacts for submitting comments or joining the mailing list
- A literature order form

PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Participants in master planning involved people of varied interests and backgrounds. Some of these “stakeholders” in the future of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest include local property owners and interest groups, local and regional elected officials, tribal representatives, motorized recreation groups, environmental organizations, non-motorized recreators, hunting /fishing guides and sports clubs, local loggers, representatives from the timber products industry, tourism providers and various members of the local business community.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT METHODS

A variety of techniques were used to gather information and provide ways for people to participate in the planning process. They include:

- Open house meetings
- Site tours
- Public listening sessions
- Direct mailings
- Opinionnaire survey
- Regular progress reports and announcements
- Public informational forums and workshops
- Web pages
- Internet list server and distribution list

- Government-to-government consultations
- Press releases and media interviews
- Distribution of public informational materials
- Presentations to groups
- Circulation of draft planning documents

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Early in the process, an opinionnaire survey and open house/forest tour was used to identify important issues to consider for the Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Results of the opinionnaire and recent public involvement indicate that most issues identified early in the planning process remain important today. Respondents suggested a variety of management options to sustain forest resources and provide a range of opportunities and benefits for the public. Complete summaries of issues addressed during various public comment phases of the planning process are contained in the *NH-AL Master Plan Progress Reports*.

The issues opinionnaire responses identified the following topics as “very important” issues for the NH-AL master plan revision:

- General composition of the forest
- Amount and type of timber products harvested
- Amount and location of timber clearcutting



- Effective protection of aesthetic values
- Amount and location of old-growth forest and activities
- Use of personal watercraft (jet-skis) on NH-AL lakes and rivers

In the mid-part of the planning process, comments received from the public (review of the NH-AL Master Plan Alternatives and Preferred Alternatives) pointed to the following specific “key” issues:

Aesthetics: A strong desire to maintain the aesthetic character of the forest remained evident in the public’s comments. The public favors designated scenic areas and corridors; protective, scenic buffers along shorelines and trails; and the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to maintain high water quality.

Biodiversity: Many describe biodiversity or ecological diversity as an essential management element and objective for the forest.

Boundary expansion: Public support was expressed for expanding the NH-AL forest boundary. Master plan participants describe a need for adding to the forest to expand recreational opportunities, for wildlife and forestry management, for socioeconomic benefits, and for wild resource protection. There is some opposition expressed from affected towns.

Camping: A range of camping styles and opportunities is popular in the NH-AL. A wide range of opinions was expressed about future camping on the forest. Overall, most people favor keeping camping on the NH-AL as a rustic, family-oriented niche. However, many people also want to see more opportunities for remote /primitive camping. Some desire campground modernization and electric hook-ups. A number of people favor expanding campgrounds to meet increasing camping demand, but others suggest no change to avoid increased congestion. Some opposition was heard on campground expansion at some specific lakes.

Deer damage: Concern exists over the effects of high deer populations on the flora and natural communities in the forest.

Education and interpretation: Education and interpretation are important. Many people called them essential to forest protection, programs, and public understanding of NH-AL’s purpose. While some suggest no change in current programs, others urged expanding educational efforts. Some master plan participants argued that more opportunities are needed to learn about such concepts as “old growth,” “sustainability,” “biodiversity,” “big-tree silviculture,” or “ecological succession,” and to increase their understanding of forest management. Establishing research and management demonstration projects was also suggested, as well as support for

the proposed forestry education center.

Forest management: Forest management remains a strong central issue. While there is broad support to manage the forest for a variety of benefits, there are divergent opinions about the management priorities and the techniques that should be used. Many favor forest production to maintain young forest and associated wildlife, recreation, and economic benefits. Some people favor *status quo* for clearcutting and management in modest-sized blocks of aspen. Others would like reduced levels of aspen and clearcutting in favor of more emphasis on pine, oak and hemlock and selective harvests. Some people suggest forest managers need the flexibility to manage the health and sustainability of the forest as they see fit.

Motorized recreation: Whether to allow increased motorized recreational access to the forest remains a strongly debated and divided issue among the public. Many desire the use of all terrain vehicles (ATVs), personal watercraft or jet skis (PWCs), and snowmobiles on the NH-AL. Increased user conflicts, public access, and environmental impacts are key concerns.

Multiple use: The public strongly supports the concept of multiple use management of the forest, defined as balanced, sustainable and compatible resource management that provides a range of public benefits and opportunities for people of all ages to experience the forest year-round. Comments spotlighted the following benefits as being especially important: natural aesthetics, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, endangered species protection, recreation and public access, education, environmental protection, tourism and economic benefits, wild resources, renewable forests and production of forest products, and biological diversity and natural communities.

Old growth forest: Public support was offered for some amount of old growth forest management on the NH-AL, with increased emphasis on native natural community management.

Public access: The public desires an increase in recreational diversity. Demand exists for some form of access to forest and water resources for nearly every kind of recreation and forest use. Recreational trails are in demand for education and interpretation; motorized sports; and silent sports – hunting, skiing, hiking, biking. Special access is desired for the disabled and the very young. Some prefer management *status quo* for all lake access. There is concern about and opposition to additional motorized access.

Remote lakes: People oppose lowering protective status on wild lakes and prefer a no-net loss of undeveloped, natural shoreline. There is support for recreational opportunities in remote lake settings. Strong support and some opposition was

voiced for the proposed Bittersweet-Prong recreation area.

Shoreline protection: Many describe increased protection of lake and stream shore lands from development and degradation from overuse as a necessity in the face of growing demands on these resources.

“Silent” sports: The public favors maintaining or expanding “silent sport” opportunities on the forest. There is a desire for nature-oriented activities that maintain the rustic Northwoods character of the forest. They describe non-motorized recreation as the most compatible with NH-AL state forest resources, existing uses and traditions.

Socio-economic issues: The public comments point to the NH-AL playing an important social and economic role in the local area and region, and that the long-term effects on these areas need to be considered in plan decisions.

Status quo: Comments from many forest visitors and users urge keeping the forest and its management just as it is today without change. They praise forest managers for the current quality of resource management and ability to meet the public’s needs.

Wild resource areas: People are strongly divided pro and con on this issue. Many want to use wild resources area designations as a means to protect sensitive native communities, rare habitat, and endangered species. Others would like to see wild resource areas designated to provide expanded remote and non-motorized recreation opportunities. Some people are opposed to the designation because of the loss of motorized access or reduced timber harvests that would result. The appropriate level of public access for these locations is often the basis of discussion. Overall, the public suggests keeping the management of popular remote resource areas at *status quo*.

FORUMS, WORKSHOPS, AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT

INFORMATIONAL FORUMS

A series of public informational forums or workshops was held to lay the groundwork for developing master plan alternatives. At each of the forums, DNR scientists presented information about the NH-AL, its resources, and recreational uses. The forums were designed to be community conversations among interested parties and allowed for an exchange of information on key topics as needed for developing master plan alternatives. Forums featured the following themes: 1) Forest Ecosystem; 2) Recreation; and 3) Water Resources.

ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Using information collected and issues identified during the information forums, the public participated in two workshops to combine various management scenarios on paper. Participants worked with department staff in a step-by-step process to develop a range of potential resource and recreation management concepts for the property. Alternatives were developed within the context of the property’s designation, best available information about the property resources and capabilities, public use, and the regional analysis.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE OPEN HOUSE

A series of four open-house style public meetings and a public review period were held to provide opportunity for interested parties to review, react, and respond to proposed alternatives. In their review of the alternatives, the public was asked to consider the property’s designation, vision and goals. Participants were encouraged to “mix and match” elements of various alternatives if needed to define their management preferences for the property.

Following review and objective consideration of public input on the alternatives, an interdisciplinary team of scientists, property staff, and regional planners assembled a “preferred” management alternative for the property. The “preferred alternative” outlines general proposals for management in recreation, land management, wild resources, and the boundary expansion. This document was presented to the public for review and input.

PUBLIC REVIEW

A formal review of the NH-AL Draft Master Plan and EIS was held from March 30 to June 1, 2005. In the first two weeks of May, four public informational meetings and public hearings were held in Neenah, Fitchburg, Boulder Junction and Wausau, WI. More than 200 people attended and 40 gave verbal testimony about the Draft Master Plan and EIS. A total of 698 public comments were received during the public comment period. Local residents, local governments, representatives of business and industry, conservation and recreation organizations, forest users and visitors, and out of state landowners participated in the review. Government-to-government contacts with tribal representatives and local government officials occurred throughout the planning process.

Public comments received during the final review were recorded to the public record and analyzed by topic to determine substantive issues. A concerted effort was made to

create a qualitative summary of key issues and unresolved issues identified by the public. The State Forest Superintendent and integrated teams of resource managers, scientists and planning specialists participated in the review of public comments. When addressing the issues, public input, scientific assessments of the forest's resources, legislative requirements and professional experience in managing the forest were all considered before management prescriptions were adjusted. The revised NH-AL Master Plan and EIS, a summary of proposed changes, and responses to public comments were presented to the state Natural Resources Board for review and final approval in October, 2005.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

When writing or revising a master plan for a property within the ceded territory (i.e., that area of northern Wisconsin where the Chippewa have off-reservation treaty rights) the Department consults with the tribe on a government-to-government level on matters potentially affecting those rights. For the NH-AL planning process the consultation was with the Lac du Flambeau Band and also designated representatives from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). GLIFWC in turn reported to and received direction from the Voigt Commission. The consultations with GLIFWC were held at key phases in the development of the draft NH-AL master plan. Several consultations focused on identifying resources included under the Chippewa off-reservation treaty rights and of special interest to the tribes. Other consultations focused on evaluating the potential impacts of various possible management actions on those resources. At each phase of the planning process representatives from GLIFWC and any other interested tribal members were invited to comment on the developing master plan document.

PUBLIC AND TRIBAL COMMENTS AND DECISION-MAKING

Throughout the planning process, Department staff recorded the public's comments in a computer database. A summary of comments was produced following public review of each stage of master plan development. The Department's analysis and summary of comments is intended to be qualitative rather than quantitative, although the general level of comment on a topic is noted. That is, it does not try to tally the number of comments concerning a particular issue. The Summary of Comments simply attempts to describe what was heard collectively and reports that information back to all public participants.

In developing the new plan, the Department carefully considered the input received from the public, tribal representatives

and other governing bodies along with the technical input of the WDNR's interdisciplinary team of scientists. Other considerations include the statutory purpose of a state forest, the draft vision statement and property goals, information contained in the Northern Forest Assessments, the Biotic Inventory, the Regional Analysis and other available data.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS USED IN NH-AL PLANNING

Information to support the planning process was compiled and made available to the public on a variety of topics. These documents were made available in paper copy and on the DNR's Internet site. The following documents were produced:

Shaping the Future, Master Planning for Wisconsin's Northern State Forests

This booklet provides an overview of master planning. Guiding principles and the role of citizens in the planning process is discussed. The document describes master planning as a participatory process using the best information available to arrive at final decisions.

Master Planning for Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest – A Resource Book

A ring binder describing historical background, plus various forest facts and figures, was assembled into a source book for use by participants during public planning forums.

Northern Forest Assessments

DNR scientists and collaborators produced a series of assessments to document their inventory and analysis of the forest. Ten different publications address the following topics: biodiversity, monitoring and evaluation, regional ecology, biotic inventory and analysis of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, socio-economics for the NH-AL State Forest Region, sustainable forestry, environmental education and awareness, recreational supply and demand, community restoration and old growth, and regional analysis of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest. Executive summaries of all documents were made available to the public at no charge.

NH-AL Master Plan – Fact Sheets

Four fact sheets were developed to inform master planning participants about historical background and master planning information. These one- or two page educational documents described the following range of topics: "The Master Plan and the First Three Phases of the Planning Process," "The NH-AL State Forest, Powell Marsh Wildlife Area, and Bearskin State Park Trail," "Management Topics," and a "Master Plan Glossary of Terms."

NH-AL Master Plan – Progress Reports

During the time leading up to the draft master plan, 13 progress reports were published. The purpose of these publications was to keep the public informed and to announce opportunities for citizen involvement. Articles published in the reports included announcements of events and calendar schedules, time lines, discussions of key issues, summaries of public comments and tribal consultations, answers to frequently asked questions, and literature order forms. At some stages in the process, key planning documents accompanied the progress report.

Draft Planning Documents

Several working draft documents were introduced or developed with involvement from the public as the plan's focus narrowed toward completion. These included a public involvement plan, draft vision and goals statements, draft master plan alternatives, the preferred alternative, and maps depicting various management areas and proposals. These were presented to participants during public meetings and by mail. They were also posted on the NH-AL master planning web site, and distributed statewide to key public and depository libraries.

Table 3.1 Chronological Summary of Public & Tribal Involvement Activities for the NH-AL State Forest Master Plan.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS AND CONTACTS:

1997

- 04/97 Public mailing – Letter sent to people who expressed an interest in NH-AL master planning.
- 05/97 Letter on status of the NH-AL plan to elected public officials in north central Wisconsin.
- 05/97 General news release on status of planning process.
- 08/97 General news release to announce the start of NH-AL planning process.
- 08/97 Public mailing #1 to reaffirm interest and to expand mailing list.
- 08/97 Media Day held in Boulder Junction.
- 09/97 Public mailing #2 included issues opinionnaire, Public Involvement Plan (PIP).
- 09/97 Brochure prepared to identify issues and provide information to the public and forest users.
- 10/97 General news release announced open house and forest tour in Boulder Junction.
- 10/97 Public informational open house and forest tour.

Public Contacts:

Local public radio; *American Forests* magazine.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

Tribal representatives including the Lac du Flambeau Tribe (LDF), the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the Voigt Task Force.

1998

- 02/98 Progress Report #1 issued.
- 02/98 Progress Report #2 - EIS decision announced.
- 03/98 General news release announced March and April Vision and Goals meetings.
- 03/98 Planning literature distributed to local media.
- 03/98 Fact sheets, updated Public Involvement Plan (PIP) mailed to internal and external contacts.
- 03/98 Public meetings – two Vision and Goals work group meetings held in March and April.
- 05/98 NH-AL open house in Woodruff, WI.
- 05/98 Planning Workshop Series flyer released.
- 06/98 Progress Report #3.
- 08/98 Progress Report #4 released with final draft vision and goals statements.
- 11/98 Progress Report #5 released with master planning fact sheets.

Public Contacts:

Local radio and newspaper contacts; a local service organization; a motorized sport club.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

Local tribal representatives and GLIFWC.

1999

- 01/99 Listserv electronic media source established and announced.
- 04/99 Progress Report #6.
- 06/99 Progress Report #7.
- 06/99 Public listening session held in Boulder Junction, WI.
- 08/99 Water Resources and Recreation Issue Forum in Minocqua, WI.
- 08/99 Forest Ecosystem Issue Forum.
- 09/99 Recreation Issues Resource Forum in Lac du Flambeau.
- 10/99 Progress Report #8, master planning information source-book made available.
- 11/99 NH-AL & Bearskin Trail Alternative Design Workshop.
- 12/99 Recreation Issues Alternatives workshop in Lake Tomahawk, WI.

Public Contacts:

Local media; workshop and forum participants.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

LDF tribal representatives.

2000

- 02/00 Progress Report #9 released and availability of the NH-AL Biotic Inventory announced.
- 04/00 NH-AL staff met with local Rotary Club to give master plan update.

Public Contacts:

Service organizations including Rotary and Kiwanis; local recreation groups; UW forestry and environmental education students.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

Local township government representatives.

2001

- 06/01 Recreation Assessments to state depository libraries, public offices, DNR service centers.

Public Contacts:

Local ATV & snowmobile clubs; Ruffed Grouse Society; loggers' conference; ORV council; local radio.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

Governor's Council on Forestry; Lac du Flambeau tribal chairs; local township chairs.

Table 3.1 Chronological Summary of Public & Tribal Involvement Activities for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest Master Plan. (continued)
2002

- 01/02 Progress Report #10 and Master Plan Alternatives distributed statewide.
- 01/02 Postcard notice of open house meeting with master plan progress update.
- 02/02 NH-AL Alternatives public meetings held in Fitchburg, Brookfield, Wausau and Boulder Junction with more than 500 public participants statewide.
- 09/02 Progress Report #11.

Public Contacts:

Three local radio stations; local television and newspapers; WI Outdoor News; ATV club; local landowner group; snowmobile club; chamber of commerce; Assoc. of State Foresters.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

LDF tribal representatives; US Forest Service.

2003

- 03/03 Progress Report #12 with Master Plan Preferred Alternative released to the public.
- 04/03 Statewide news release to announce Preferred Alternative and public meeting.
- 04/03 Preferred Alternative announcement to master plan participants.
- 04/03 Open house public meeting presenting the Preferred Alternative in Boulder Junction.
- 10/03 Progress Report #13.

Public Contacts:

ATV clubs; local radio stations and newspapers; local bicycle club; lake associations.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

Township officials; USFS; County Board chairmen; State Natural Resources Board; LDF and GLIFWC tribal representatives.

2004

- 5/04 Public dedication ceremony held for Rainbow Flowage land purchase.
- 9/04 First annual NH-AL public information meeting in Boulder Junction, WI.
- 10/04 Progress Report #14.

Public Contacts:

Local ATV club; Wildlife club; ECCOLA; Forestry organization; local lakes association; fishing guides; snowmobile clubs; citizens group.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

LDF and GLIFWC tribal representatives; local town chairmen.

2005

- 3/05 Distribution of Draft NH-AL Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement to stakeholders and NR 150 required contacts.
- 5/05 62-day Public review period held for the Draft NH-AL Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
- 5/05 Public hearings/informational meetings to receive public comment and present the Draft NH-AL Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement held in Fitchburg (Msdison), Neenah, Wausau, and Boulder Junction, WI — more that 200 public participants and 40 public hearing testimonies.
- 10/05 Revised NH-AL Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, a summary of proposed changes, and responses to public comments presented to the state Natural Resources Board for review and final approval.

Public Contacts:

Local Rotary club; citizens' conservation group; Bot Scout organization; lake association; local and statewide media; UW research scientists.

Government-to-Government Contacts:

LDF and GLIFWC tribal representatives; County Forest Administrators; township officials; state governments representatives.

